

LYNCHBURG CITY COUNCIL

Agenda Item Summary

MEETING DATE: **September 9, 2003**

AGENDA ITEM NO.: 10

CONSENT: **X**

REGULAR:

CLOSED SESSION:

(Confidential)

ACTION: **X**

INFORMATION:

ITEM TITLE: **Support of Virginia First Cities Education Resolution**

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Virginia First Cities proposed resolution in support of Virginia's Students.

SUMMARY: One of the goals adopted by the Virginia First Cities Coalition (VFC) for the next year is to be a voice for education funding both alone and in cooperation with other groups. From the efforts of VFC and other interested groups, the Alliance for Virginia's Students has been formed. The attached memorandum explains the purpose of the alliance and its membership.

To support the efforts of the Alliance for Virginia's Students and other VFC initiatives on behalf of education funding, the Policy Committee of VFC asked that each VFC member make a one-time contribution of \$5,000 in support of efforts to improve education funding. In addition, each VFC member is also being asked to adopt the attached resolution in support of Virginia's students.

Although Council has approved the \$5000 contribution on the first reading, with the second reading scheduled for this meeting, the resolution was inadvertently left off the Council report for your August 12 meeting.

PRIOR ACTION(S): August 5, 2003 Finance Committee
August 12, 2003 City Council—appropriated \$5,000

FISCAL IMPACT: None

CONTACT(S): Kimball Payne

ATTACHMENT(S): Memo describing the Alliance for Virginia's Students; proposed resolution in support of Virginia's students.

REVIEWED BY: lkp

A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF VIRGINIA'S STUDENTS

WHEREAS, many students in Virginia's public schools are at-risk of not learning what is required to earn a high school diploma, enroll in a college or university or enter the job market, and even the successful students who graduate are affected by schools struggling to provide the level of educational quality they need and deserve; and, whereas, teachers often find they do not have the tools or training necessary to teach the subjects mandated for achievement of state standards and teachers' salaries and the uncertain state support of salaries do not provide the kind of incentives that attract and keep the most talented professionals, and,

WHEREAS, state funding for public education does not reflect the true cost of constructing, staffing, equipping, operating and maintaining schools that perform at the level needed to support the foundation for standards of quality and learning, and the costs of educating at-risk students create additional fiscal pressures on many school systems, and, whereas, not only are students being left behind, taxpayers are seeing the increasing burden of higher local real estate tax rates as local governments try to pay both their share and the state's share of education costs, and, when Virginia's students plan for higher education, they face additional challenges because legislative reports also have verified that appropriate levels of funding have not been achieved for higher education, and one of the worst results of reduced funding for college students is that so many qualified Virginia students are denied admission because the faculty, buildings, and equipment are simply not there to accommodate them, and;

WHEREAS, the effects of being left behind without a high school diploma or a college degree, especially for an at-risk student, are compelling. A Virginian who has a high school diploma earns a lot more than one who does not. A degree from a community college means more, and a four-year college degree means even more. Education literally pays, in addition to its other quality-of-life benefits.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED That the Lynchburg City Council urges the General Assembly to provide additional state dollars to fully fund the actual costs of the Standards of Quality and the legislative guidelines for higher education funding. These actions are essential if our elementary, middle and high schools, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities are to meet the following goals:

- Smaller classes in schools and colleges where teachers and faculty can provide students the individual attention they need to learn and graduate on time;
- Sufficient numbers of well-qualified teachers and faculty to give every student the opportunity to graduate from high school and to have access to higher education and opportunities for training and skill development;
- Competitive salaries to attract and keep well-qualified teachers and faculty to help students learn;
- Modern, safe classrooms, laboratories, technology and equipment to provide the environment in which students learn best;
- Accountability and performance measurement at all levels for students, teachers, faculty, administrators and others responsible for helping students learn.

Adopted:

Certified: _____
Clerk of Council



Virginia First Cities Coalition

Charlottesville
Danville
Fredericksburg
Hampton
Hopewell
Lynchburg
Martinsville
Newport News
Norfolk
Petersburg
Portsmouth
Richmond
Roanoke
Staunton
Winchester

July 21, 2003

To: VFC Board of Directors
From: Connie Bawcum
RE: Alliance for Virginia's Students

At the May 2nd meeting, the Virginia First Cities Coalition agreed to join with other organizations to advocate for adequate State funding for education. The purpose of this letter is to update you on the status of this effort.

The Alliance for Virginia's Students (AVS) is being incorporated as a 501 c (4) nonprofit corporation. The founding members include VFC, VACO, Virginia Education Council, and Virginia Business Higher Education Council. A more complete description of the members is attached. VML provided initial seed money for the initiative, but the VML Executive Committee declined to join the Alliance at its last meeting. Other organizations and individuals are participating with the Alliance and may join once it is incorporated.

The Alliance is unique in that it is the first time that local government, the K-12 system, higher education and business interests have come together. The Alliance is strongly nonpartisan and is working independently of other efforts related to public education.

The Alliance is being structured for a long-term commitment to advocate for additional funding for K-20 education with both the general public and state elected officials. The first activity of the Alliance is to ask each candidate for the House and Senate to sign the attached "Pledge of Commitment to Virginia's Students." The goal is to complete the pledge signing campaign by Labor Day. Some of you will be asked to join a team of college presidents and school superintendents to meet with candidates to ask for their endorsement. We will be coordinating these meetings over the next several weeks.

Please use every opportunity to voice support for the efforts of VFC and the Alliance for Virginia's Students to obtain additional state education funding. If you have any questions or suggestions about this initiative, please just let me know.

"ACHIEVING DREAMS"
THE ALLIANCE FOR VIRGINIA'S STUDENTS

The four founding organizations of "The Alliance for Virginia's Students" are committed to providing Virginia's students – kindergarten through college – with the best possible education and are working together to achieve that common goal. Collectively, they represent thousands of Virginians who have a compelling interest in the education of all Virginians.

These organizations include the Virginia Education Coalition; the Virginia Business Higher Education Council, including the public college presidents; Virginia First Cities Coalition; and Virginia Association of Counties.

Virginia Education Coalition

The Virginia Education Coalition is a group of 12 of the foremost educational organizations in the state. Its purpose is to provide direction and guidance for a high quality, comprehensive K-12 education for all students in the Commonwealth. One of its goals is to convince the Governor and members of the General Assembly to make education a top priority and to fund the Standards of Quality as required by the Constitution. This includes funding teacher and principal positions, salaries and benefits that will attract the best and brightest for Virginia's students. It also includes maintaining funding for the categorical and incentive programs not included in the Standards of Quality. The member organizations are:

- Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals
- Virginia Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- Virginia Association of School Superintendents
- Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals
- Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Virginia Congress of Parents and Teachers
- Virginia Counselors Association
- Virginia Education Association
- Virginia Professors of Educational Leadership
- Virginia School Counselors Association
- Virginia School Boards Association
- Virginia Middle School Association

Virginia Business Higher Education Council

Alarmed at the erosion of funding and public support for higher education, 30 Virginia business leaders teamed with college and university presidents in 1993 to form the Virginia Business Higher Education Council (VBHEC). Today, the Council's membership includes 71 business leaders in partnership with Virginia's public college and university presidents. Its mission is to strengthen and support Virginia's institutions of higher education and urge others to do so.

Virginia First Cities Coalition

The Virginia First Cities Coalition includes 15 of the most stressed older cities in Virginia. The coalition advocates state policy changes that will re-energize cities and help create a high quality of life in urban areas. Its goal is to increase Virginia's financial support to fiscally stressed cities. The Coalition supports restructuring the state's tax system to distribute the tax burden more equitably and raising state taxes to generate the additional funding required annually to fulfill the State's education, transportation and human services needs.

Virginia Association of Counties

The Virginia Association of Counties is an association of 95 local governments. Its mission is to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of counties in better serving the people of Virginia. It represents local governments at the state and national levels in legislative and regulatory processes and provides a resource network for planning and implementing new ideas and technologies.

A PLEDGE OF COMMITMENT TO VIRGINIA'S STUDENTS

Why this pledge is needed:

Many students in Virginia's public schools are at-risk of not learning what is required to earn a high school diploma, enroll in a college or university or enter the job market. Even the successful students who graduate are affected by schools struggling to provide the level of educational quality they need and deserve. Classes are too large. Too many classrooms are old and not equipped with the technology required for today's competitive environment. Teachers often find they do not have the tools or training necessary to teach the subjects mandated for achievement of state standards. Teachers' salaries and the uncertain state support of salaries do not provide the kind of incentives that attract and keep the most talented professionals.

State funding for public education does not reflect the true cost of constructing, staffing, equipping, operating and maintaining schools that perform at the level needed to support the foundation for standards of quality and learning. The costs of educating at-risk students create additional fiscal pressures on many school systems. Not only are students being left behind, taxpayers are seeing the increasing burden of higher local real estate tax rates as local governments try to pay both their share and the state's share of education costs. The state shortfall and the realistic costs of actually meeting these standards have been verified by recent legislative studies.

When Virginia's students plan for higher education, they face additional challenges. Legislative reports also have verified that appropriate levels of funding have not been achieved for higher education. As costs increase at colleges and universities, higher tuition can only replace a portion of state budget cuts. Classes are too large, and there are not enough faculty members to teach all the classes that students need. It is becoming common for students to have to stay an extra semester to get a degree, and this can cost students and their families thousands of extra dollars. Budget cuts result in lower faculty pay, and lower pay means that it is harder to attract and keep the best. But perhaps the worst result of reduced funding for college students is that so many qualified Virginia students are denied admission. The faculty, buildings and equipment are simply not there to accommodate them.

The effects of being left behind without a high school diploma or a college degree, especially for an at-risk student, are compelling. A Virginian who has a high school diploma earns a lot more than one who does not. A degree from a community college means more, and a four-year college degree means even more. Education literally pays, in addition to its other quality-of-life benefits.

My Pledge to Virginia's Students

Beginning in 2004 and during my term, I, _____, candidate for the ____ Senate/House District, pledge to support and work for additional state dollars to fully fund the actual costs of the Standards of Quality and the legislative guidelines for higher education funding. These actions are essential if our elementary, middle and high schools, community colleges and four-year colleges and universities are to meet the following goals:

- Smaller classes in schools and colleges where teachers and faculty can provide students the individual attention they need to learn and graduate on time;
- Sufficient numbers of well-qualified teachers and faculty to give every student the opportunity to graduate from high school and to have access to higher education and opportunities for training and skill development;
- Competitive salaries to attract and keep well-qualified teachers and faculty to help students learn;
- Modern, safe classrooms, laboratories, technology and equipment to provide the environment in which students learn best;
- Accountability and performance measurement at all levels for students, teachers, faculty, administrators and others responsible for helping students learn.

Signature

Date